

Frederick Hall House
(Hall-Fowler Library)
126 East Main Street
Ionia
Ionia County
Michigan

HABS No. MI-238

HABS
MICH,
34-Ion,
1-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20240

FREDERICK HALL HOUSE

HABS
MICH,
34-ION,
1-

Location: 126 East Main Street
Ionia, Ionia County, Michigan
Latitude 42° 59' 01"
Longitude 85° 03' 44"

Present Owner: Hall-Fowler Library

Present Use: Hall-Fowler Library

Statement of Significance: Built by a prominent family of Michigan, the Frederick Hall House is one of the most elegant forms of Italianate architecture adopted in western Michigan. Highly ornate brackets supporting the overhanging cornice, an octagonal cupola, and a richly finished interior contribute to the distinction of this building. The mansion is built of variegated ashlar sandstone which deviates in color from a yellow grey to a reddish brown. The unusual sandstone was excavated from quarries near Ionia.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: 1869-1870
2. Architect: unknown
3. Builder and supplier: Captain Lucius Mills was the builder. He carved the stone balustrades of the entrance portico. The sandstone used in the house was quarried west of Lyons, Michigan.
4. Original and subsequent owners; legal description of property:
 - 1870-1883 Frederick Hall
 - 1883-1901 Joshua Lounsbury Fowler. He was the husband of Frederick Hall's only daughter, Marion.
 - 1901-1903 Marion Fowler (widow of Joshua Fowler)
 - 1903- Hall Fowler Library. Marion Hall Fowler donated the house to the city of Ionia to be used as a public library.

City of Ionia Kit and Rich addition
Lots 1, 2, 3 and the west 12.35 of
Lot 4 and also Lots 16, 17 and 18
except the west 33' of Lot 18 (Library Street).
5. Original plan and construction: When used by the family the rooms were arranged as follows: Ground floor; S.W. room-parlor, N.W. room-dining, N.W. room-bedroom, S.E. room-family. Second floor; East suite-used by Marion, S.W. room-billiards room, N.W. room-guest.
6. Alterations and additions: The house as a whole retains most of its original architectural features, despite its use as a library. Most of the bookshelves and tables have been installed with discretion.

B. Historical Events and Persons Associated with the Building:

Frederick Hall was a local banker and important public official. For more than forty years he was a leading figure in Ionia. He was born in Vermont in 1816 and first came to Michigan in 1836, and settled in Ionia in 1841. The buying and selling of pine lands was his main business but the public positions he held were numerous. He was elected to the State legislature in 1849, a Democratic candidate for Congress, a Democratic candidate for Lt. Governor and became the first mayor of Ionia in 1873. Hall was a director of the Ionia and Lansing Railroad and President of the First National Bank of Ionia from its organization. He had earlier served as receiver of public money for the land office at Ionia in 1845.

Since 1903, the mansion has housed the Hall-Fowler Memorial Library. On October 9, 1903 it was opened to the public as a gift to the city from Mrs. Marion Hall-Fowler.

C. Sources of Information

1. Primary and unpublished sources:

Brock, Mrs. L.P. "Reminiscences", typescript located in Hall-Fowler Library, Ionia.

Deed from Marion Hall-Fowler to the city of Ionia, dated July 8, 1903.

2. Secondary and published sources:

Ionia Sentinel-Standard, August 2, 1965

Schenck, John S. History of Ionia and Montcalm Counties Michigan. Philadelphia, D.W. Ensign and Company, 1881.

Wright, Edward J. Ionia in 1891, Gazetteer. Ionia, Sentinel Printing Company, 1891.

PART II ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement

1. Architectural interest and merit: Built in the High Italianate style the building is unique in its rich detailing and use of unusual variegated (local) sandstone.
2. Condition of fabric: Minor alterations have been made converting the building to its present use, but it is well maintained.

B. Description of Exterior

1. Overall dimensions, layout and shape: The structure is two stories with cupola, L shaped with rear wing, 42' frontage by 37' in depth. There is a 7' by 21' side wing and a 21' by 30' rear wing, not including small porches. The front faces south.
2. Foundations: Foundations are four feet high, three rusticated courses of sandstone with a plain water table. (Granite ashlar under the three brick walls.)
3. Walls: Exterior walls of main elevations are of regular sandstone ashlar varying in color from yellow-gray to reddish-brown, with veining an angle to the horizontal. Courses are 13 1/2" high, including a 1/4" mortar joint (line-sand mortar) mostly repointed with cement mortar. There are beveled quoins at corners. The north wall of the main portion, and north and east walls of the rear wing, are yellow brick; there are occasional bonding courses of stretchers and headers alternating, and of headers, but they do not follow a regular pattern. The height from ground to cornice is approximately 32 feet.

4. Porches: There is a central porch on the south front, one bay, one story. It is placed against a slightly-projecting central pavilion and shelters the main entrance. Wood columns are square; they occur in pairs at the corners but the responding wall columns are single. The outermost capitals (of the pairs) are of modified Doric type, the inner ones Corinthianesque. The architrave (or lintel) on front is shaped in complex curves along the lower edge; on the sides it is straight except for quadrant curves near the capitals. There is a bracketed wood cornice with pendant ornaments at the corners. The railing, with its plain rectangular slats, is probably a replacement. The floor is sandstone, reached by six sandstone steps with moulded nosing, bounded by curved ramping cheek blocks.

In the southwest angle is a one-story porch, one bay wide and two bays deep. It has square wood columns with chamfered corners, on moulded bases. In the upper part of the openings is fanciful wood tracery. The railing has ornamental work in vertical openings between slats. The cornice is bracketed. The concrete floor and steps are replacements.

In the northwest angle is a simple wood porch, one by two bays.

5. Chimneys: There are three chimneys of yellow brick with simple cornice and necking. Two are in the main portion near the center of the east and west sides,

respectively; they are several feet inside. The third is near the intersection of ridge and hips on the rear wing.

6. Openings, doorways and doors:

a. Doorways and doors:

The main entrance is centered on the front, under a porch. The brick opening is segmental-arched; inside it are wood colonnettes and moulded trim. Jambs and soffit are wood-paneled. There is a glazed transom above a plain bar. The door is double, each leaf having two complex panels: a square one below and a vertical one above. The upper panel is moulded; inner mouldings at the upper and lower ends are shaped with a rectangular central portion and two quadrants to form a trefoil arch, leaving spandrels in the corners between inner and outer mouldings. Within the panel is a raised field of like shape; on its axis is a raised baluster-like ornament, with torus and scotias at the center, and knobs at top and bottom. The lower panel is treated in the same way, except for modifications in proportion because of its lesser height.

The doors are oak, natural color, varnished. They may have been painted over at some time, then refinished; they were probably natural color, originally. Each leaf is hung on two large brass pivot-hinges which appear original; the handle and lock are replacements.

A single door at the north end of the southwest porch has four moulded panels, the upper tall pair being rounded on top. It is in a rectangular opening. A door at the south end of the northwest porch is similar, but the upper portion has been altered to a single glazed panel.

A service entrance at the north end of the rear wing has a single door with four plain panels, having slightly-raised fields. The concrete steps there are modern. There is a similar entrance on the east wall of the rear wing, with concrete stoop and steps.

b. Windows:

Openings typically are segmental-arched and ornamented with a hoodmould, of stone, cove-moulded, ending on enriched corbels; the keystone is ornamented with a pendant acanthus leaf. Most openings on the brick walls have plain brick hoodmoulds. Sills are plain sandstone.

Dougle-hung sash are typical, two lights over two lights. At the second story over the main entrance is a double window within a semicircular-arched masonry opening; each half is round-arched. There are heavy wood mullions.

There are no exterior shutters.

7. Enclosed porch: An enclosed porch at the southeast corner is two narrow bays by four narrow bays, arcaded and glazed. Within each wood arch is a double-hung window, the panes being dividied by narrow muttins to give the

effect of two round-arched openings. Piers are wood, square in section, paneled, and have modified Doric type capitals with pendant decoration on the lower edge of the abacus. Arches are semicircular and have moulded archivolts. The cornice is bracketed. This porch has a stone foundation.

8. Roof: The roof is hipped, of low pitch, except for being pedimented over the central pavilion on the south facade.

- a. Cornices:

A moulded stone course defines the lower edge of a frieze which is two courses in height. The wooden cornice has widely-projecting soffits. At corners and other accented points are pairs of ornate wood brackets with pendant ornaments. These brackets overlap the frieze and extend more than one foot below it. Between these main brackets are simpler ones just the height of the frieze.

- b. Cupola:

At the center of the main roof is an octagonal wooden cupola, with bracketed cornice and a pair of semicircular-arched windows on each face. There are no dormers.

C. Description of Interior

1. Plan

- a. First Floor

There is a central hall with two major rooms on each side. On the west side these have been opened to the hall and to each other, with lintels well below

the cornices, to form an open book shelf room.

There is a small vestibule inside the entrance; the stair is at the rear of the hall. In the rear wing are two rooms, one behind the door, and minor spaces.

b. Second floor

There is a central hall with two rooms at each side; over the entrance vestibule is a small chamber. In the rear wing are three servants' bedrooms connected by a side hall, and a stair at each end descending to the first floor.

2. Stairs: The main stair, at the north end of the central hall, ascends toward the rear and curves in a semicircle, leaving an open well; there are 21 risers. The walnut newel is quite heavy; it has an octagonal base or plinth, each face containing a panel with a carved floral spray. Above the plinth is a turned pair of scotia mouldings. The shaft is octagonal, tapered, containing a panel on each face with a carved relief floral motif. Above this are two turned torus mouldings with a scotia between; the upper torus is covered with radiating leaves on the upper surface, in low relief. Next are another scotia and an ovolo, and the top, which is formed by a round continuation of the moulded handrail.

There is an open string with scrolled brackets. There are two balusters per tread; they have turned bases and capitals, and tapered octagonal shafts. The railing continues around the well at the second floor. There is an enclosed service stair at each end of the

rear wing.

3. Floorings: Floors now have modern composition coverings.
In the rear wing are 4 1/4"-boards (covered with linoleum).
4. Wall and ceiling finish: Walls and ceilings are plastered, typically.
5. Doors: Typically, doors are four-paneled with mouldings: a tall pair above a lower pair. They have mortice locks, hang on three large butts, and have silver or ornamental brass knobs. There is a sliding door in the small second-story chamber.
6. Trim: Typical door trim is a wide architrave, two fascias, a bold torus, and several small mouldings outside it. Natural wood in two tones gives some variety but not a strong contrast. Window trim is similar; on the first story it extends to the floor and there is paneling below the stool. Soffits are paneled and there are interior shutters in pockets at the jambs. Plain trim is typical in the rear wing. A high moulded wood base is typical. Fine-grained hard woods are used on the first story, and pine on much of the second story. All is varnished.
7. Interior finish, room by room
 - a. Entrance vestibule:

This has an unornamented plaster cornice with a cove, and a lozenge-shaped ornamental centerpiece in the ceiling.
 - b. Entrance and stair hall:

There is an ornamental plaster cornice consisting of (a) Lower band: an egg in a cartouche alternating

with a pendant fruit cluster; (b) Cove, with conventional oak leaves spiraling around a stalk; (c) Upper band: upright conventional leaves, somewhat like the acanthus. This cornice stops at the stair well.

There is a wainscot with a low relief pattern, of composition ("Lincrusta" type). The ornamental motifs utilize flowers, birds, clouds and reeded texture. This wainscot continues up along the stair, and in the second-story hall.

c. Southeast room, first story

A wide plaster cornice consists of a cove between roll mouldings, bordered at the upper and lower edges by an egg-and-dart band. On a slightly-projecting chimney breast at the center of the north wall there is a light oak mantel-piece somewhat resembling designs associated with Charles Eastlake; it has modified Ionic colonnettes, a bracketed frieze and a thin mantel shelf. Yellow and brown square tiles with semi-floral, semi-geometrical patterns in relief surround the fireplace opening and form the hearth.

d. The northeast room on the first story has no cornice but is otherwise typical.

e. Southwest room, first story.

The plaster cornice consists of: (a) mouldings; (b) a narrow frieze with a row of spaced ballflowers; (c) an enriched modillion course with rosettes in the soffit between modillions; (d) corona,

bead-and-reel and leaf-and-tongue mouldings.

f. Northwest room, first story.

The plaster cornice has a cove and plain mouldings.

The ceiling is paneled by means of narrow reeded strips of wood, blocks being at the intersections.

Panels around the border have a very low relief geometric pattern; the others are textured with a pattern similar to conventional Chinese clouds. This work appears to date from the end of the 19th century.

Wood trim in this room is of one tone: varnished oak. The forms are typical.

g. Hall, second story.

There is a plaster cornice with a cove and plain mouldings, below which is a frieze ornamented with swags and classic lamps, alternating, in low relief.

At the center of the ceiling is a plaster centerpiece.

h. Chamber above the entrance vestibule.

This square room has typical trim, and in addition, a book cabinet extending from floor to ceiling, with a glazed door. There is a window seat. The ceiling is painted: a border and a blue panel with spider-web motifs in gold. The plaster cornice has a blue cove between yellow and brown mouldings (above and below); below this is a wall-paper frieze. The walls are covered with old wallpaper, dull yellow in the background with neutral brown clover wreaths and bees (larger than life). The decorative work on walls and ceiling appears to date from the end of the 19th Century. This small

room is highly attractive.

i. Southeast room, second story.

This has a moulded plaster cornice painted green, with a cove. The ceiling is papered (or painted) with a three-way geometrical interlace (Islamic). Below the cornice is a wide frieze with an enriched gilt picture moulding at the lower edge. In the frieze is wallpaper in brown and yellow: a small-scale floral pattern. There is a plaster centerpiece in the ceiling.

At the center of the north wall is a conventional dark marble mantelpiece with an arched opening, probably original. The frieze and ceiling appear to date from the end of the 19th Century.

j. The southwest room has a plaster cornice and centerpiece; trim is typical.

k. Behind the stair, in an interior compartment, is a bathroom with a wood and sheet-metal tub. Tub and wainscot are of matched and beaded boards. Other fixtures appear to be of the late 19th Century.

D. Description of Site

This building occupies a large lot extending from Main Street on the south to Washington Street on the north; on the west a street separates it from the Court house and public offices. Along the east line is an ornamental cast-iron fence, all that remains of a fence which once enclosed the lot. Landscaping is now informal, consisting chiefly of open lawn with several trees. Southeast of the house is a cast-iron ornamental fountain of uncertain date. The ground is level.

Prepared by: Harley J. McKee, Architect, N.P.S., August 13,
1965

Harry J. Hunderman, Michigan History Division, January 1975

William K. Alderfer, September 8, 1965